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KOREAN CEMENT WORKERS REVOLT AT MASSACRE OF JAPANESE TECHNICIANS

The massacre of Japanese technicians by the North Korean government at the Ch'onnae Cement Factory near Wonsan led to a violent revolt by the resentful native workers there.

The Ch'onnae Cement Factory is the largest of its kind in Korea; it employs 10,000 workers and produces 60 percent of Korea's cement. Over 30 Japanese technicians were employed here. Including the dependents of these technicians, the total number of Japanese quartered at the factory dormitory reached 80.

On 6 October 1949 Kim Il-song welcomed seven Russian technicians for this cement factory as guests of the People's Republic. Since the Japanese technicisns were no longer needed, the government reportedly ordered their extermination in order to avoid the trouble of sending them back to Japan. The massacre of the Japanese technicians and their dependents, except six Japanese girls of ages ranging from 17 to 19, was carried out by Kwon Sang-ul, age 31, the factory superintendent and chairman of the Ch'onnae Headquarters of the Korean Communist Party. Some of the victims were taken outside of the factory and shot, while others were held in the factory basement until they died of starvation.

It was reported that the Korean workers who saw the massacre deeply resented it. Their mounting indignation toward Kwon and the Russian technicians, who raped the Japanese women en masse, finally broke out in violence when the main boiler of the factory exploded. This occurred on 2 November 1949 due to the Russian technicians' negligence, and resulted in 270 workers being killed instantly and 300 being injured critically. Almost all of the 10,000 workers revolted and fought with some ten Russian military guards and 20 henchmen of Kwon, with hammers and other handtools. Five of the Russian technicians were bludgeoned to death, while Kwon and his henchmen were shot to death in the factory basement by workers who seized rifles from the Russian guards.

On 3 November the People's Army stationed in Wonsan was dispatched to the factory, and some 1,000 workers were arrested. The authorities feared the possibility of the violence spreading to the nearby Munp'yong Chemical Works and Hungnam Fertilizer Factory.

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